

Closing the Refugee Education Gap: Why FORA's Work Matters More Than Ever

The [United Nations High Commission for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) works to protect displaced people, provide life-saving aid and expand access to opportunities like education. At the end of 2024, more than 123 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, including 31 million refugees. Among them are 12.4 million school-aged children yet nearly 46% are out of school, according to the agency's [2025 Education Report](#). The steepest drop comes at the secondary level, where only 37% of refugee youth are enrolled, compared to 67% at the primary level.

The UNHCR warns recent cuts to humanitarian and development aid are already putting progress at risk ([UNHCR, 2025](#)). Lack of renewed investment could undermine previous gains, leaving refugee children vulnerable to child labor, early marriage and exploitation. Education is not just a right, it's a lifeline.

The Refugee Education Gap

Refugee students face barriers far greater than peers in other low-resource settings, such as children in low-income and fragile or conflict-affected countries. Even at the primary level, enrollment for refugee children lags behind children in low-income countries. By secondary school, the gap widens further, with millions of teens out of class during the most critical years for future opportunities.

The challenges go beyond access. Refugee youth often deal with language barriers, interrupted schooling, unrecognized transcripts, financial strain, and trauma. In the U.S., many also struggle with [absenteeism](#) caused by transportation issues, family responsibilities, or feeling disconnected in unfamiliar classrooms. Each missed day makes it harder to catch up and harder to stay enrolled.

Where FORA Comes In

This is where we step in. While the global numbers feel overwhelming, FORA proves that local action can transform lives.

At FORA, we utilize High Impact Tutoring, an evidence-based approach proven to improve outcomes and reduce absenteeism. Tutors meet with students consistently in one-on-one or small-group sessions, building accountability and belonging alongside academic growth. For refugee youth navigating new schools and cultures, this consistency can be the difference between disengagement and success.

Tutors don't just help with English or math— they provide mentorship, stability, and confidence. In a world where only 9% of refugee youth ([UNHCR, 2025](#)) reach higher education ([UNHCR, 2025](#)), FORA's model keeps that pathway open.

Why Funding Matters

The UNHCR makes it clear: progress is fragile. Aid cuts are straining refugee-hosting countries and threatening to reverse gains ([UNHCR, 2025](#)). Classrooms are overcrowded, teachers underqualified, and in some countries, pupil-teacher ratios for refugees exceed 200:1 ([UNHCR, 2025](#)).

These funding gaps ripple down to local programs like FORA. Sustaining High Impact Tutoring requires resources to recruit, train, and support tutors. Without investment, refugee students risk slipping through the cracks both abroad and here in Chicago.

A Call to Action

The refugee education crisis is global, but solutions start locally. FORA shows that when communities step up, refugee students don't just survive, they thrive.

Now is the time to act:

- Volunteer as a tutor or mentor.
- Donate to support life-changing programming.
- Advocate for refugee education funding.

Every hour of tutoring, every dollar given, and every voice raised helps close the refugee education gap. The stakes are high but the promise of education is unbreakable.

References

- UNHCR. (2025). The Unbreakable Promise: Resilience and Resolve in Refugee Education. Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

<https://www.unhcr.org/fr-fr/en/media/unhcr-education-report-2025>